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Overting the covert

Anwar Sadat called him "a vicious criminal, 100 percent sick, and possessed of a demon." Sudan's President Nimeiri said he had a "split personality, both of them evil." Even the PLO called him a "madman." He is, of course, Muammar Qaddafi, international agent of terror.

He once ordered a \$12 billion arms shipment from the Soviet Union to resupply his 22,000-man army. In 1970 he opened shop to build a nuclear bomb. (Nobody knows how close he is.) He provided the funds, arms, and organization for the 1972 massacre of Israeli athletes in Munich. In 1976 he initiated a \$580 million slush fund for the world's leftist terror groups.

Who can forget the time he assigned hit men to get Jimmy Carter? Or his standing offer of \$1 million to anybody who would murder Anwar Sadat? He has mobilized goon squads to liquidate Libyans in exile, has destabilized governments across Africa and Latin America. The list of his crimes would fill an encyclopedia.

In 1983 the Organization of African Unity called on the United States to end Col. Qaddafi's terror campaign, a cry that has been echoed a hundred times. Wise Americans al-

ways have assumed that Washington was taking steps to curb him. Now, thanks to *The Washington Post's* Bob Woodward, that anti-terror campaign is being splashed across the front pages.

Apparently it is no longer possible for the U.S. government to do anything privately. Sufficient leaks exist in the administration and congressional oversight committees to ensure that any covert operation will appear in the press. (A spy who leaks directly to the Soviets goes to jail. Press suppliers walk the streets.)

This leak isn't especially damaging because the CIA is doing everything by the book: no wacky terror manuals, no poisonous cigars, no plans for assassination. Most Americans will be heartened by the CIA's interest. Even so, three things trouble: (1) the blithe assumption that the public has a right to know everything, (2) the impunity with which administration and congressional staffers seem able to leak, and (3) the tendency of Congress to criticize even the most defensible operation if it is "covert." If plans to dislodge Libya's Qaddafi are bruised by publicity, imagine what happens when the target is less obviously insane.